Elements of the Blues: Sound File Transcripts

Part 1: "Take a Good Look at Me"

Take a good look, take a good look at me
Take a good look, take a good look at me
Might be who I say I am, that's not all I might be.

Take a good look, take a good look at you
Take a good look, take a good look at you
Might be who you say you are, might be someone else too.

You're the reason, you're the reason that I'm blue
You're the reason, you're the reason that I'm blue
Now I had to go and love you, what more could I do?

Part 2: Twelve-Bar Blues

In our article about blues music, we have used certain terms, which, relating to sound, might be illustrated by sound examples. When people talk about a "twelve-bar blues," the "bar" is a musical measure, usually a set of four beats, like this: *[Demonstrates on guitar and harmonica]* (One, two, three, four...) The "backbeat" is the beat that comes on the second and fourth beats. *[Demonstrates]* (One, **two**, three, **four**...) I'm doing it here with a guitar, but it's really fun with a drummer.

Blues music is famous for the "blue note." This comes when certain notes are "flatted," or bent downward. In an eight-note major scale, the third and seventh notes are often bent. A "chord" is a combination of notes played together. In the song heard earlier, "Take a Good Look", a verse uses a standard twelve-bar blues chord progression, with the chord the same as the key for the first four bars as the first line is sung. *[First verse of "Take a Good Look" plays in background.]* For bars five and six, the verse usually repeats the first line while going to the IV ("four") chord. It then returns to the I ("one") chord for bars seven and eight. The verse will then go to the V ("five") chord and a new line for the ninth bar, and then often walk down to the IV chord before resolving on the I chord for bars eleven and twelve, often with the V chord on the twelfth bar as the turnaround.

There are many variations on this pattern, but it remains the basis for much of blues, country and western, and rock 'n' roll.

Part 3: Playing Techniques

Certain playing techniques are characteristic of the blues. Early Mississippi Delta guitarists of the '20s and '30s played a finger-picked style. *[Demonstrates]* This often used a metal slide or a glass bottleneck on the guitar's neck. *[Demonstrates]* Guitarists like B. B. King learned to emulate the sound of a slide by finger vibrato on the neck. *[Demonstrates]* Certain guitar patterns have become standard and are known as basic "chops"... *[demonstrates]* while other patterns, often characteristic of certain styles or players, are known as "riffs". *[Demonstrates]* In the late 1940s, harmonica players, like Little Walter, began playing with microphones through amplifiers intended for guitarists to get the warm tone known as the "Mississippi saxophone". *[Demonstrates]*

Part 4: Evolution of the Blues

The evolution of the blues to rock 'n' roll may be seen in the *tempo*, or speed, of the song. If we take the sedate pace of the Delta blues of the '20s as a starting point... *[demonstrates]* we can then pep it up to a brisk Chicago blues tempo of the early '50s. *[Demonstrates]* A further increase in the speed takes it into the realm of rock 'n' roll. *[Demonstrates]* Personally, I like to mix it up! *[Demonstrates]*